



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

# MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR Retaining Wall/Level Backfill

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INFORMATION  
BULLETIN  
**221**  
June 2001

Construction of retaining walls, except those less than three feet high and not supporting surcharge, requires a permit and is regulated by City of San Diego building codes.

This information bulletin outlines the city's requirements for retaining walls with level backfill. Information Bulletin 222 covers retaining walls with sloping backfill.

For information on how to obtain a permit for a retaining wall, see Information Bulletin 220.

## I. INSPECTIONS

Inspections must be performed during several phases of construction. Please call for inspections at the following times:

A. When the footing has been dug with the steel tied securely in its final position, and the site is ready for the concrete to be placed, a footing inspection is needed.

B. A masonry pregrout inspection is required when the block has been laid and the steel is in place, but before the grout has been placed.

1. If cleanout holes *are* used, block may be laid to the full height at the grout pour before calling for the pregrout inspection. Grout shall be placed in a continuous pour in grout lifts not exceeding 6 feet.
2. If cleanout holes *are not* used, a masonry pregrout inspection is required prior to each grout pour. Block cannot be laid higher than the grout pour. Note that cleanouts are required for all grout pours over 5 feet in height.

C. After grouting is completed and rock or rubble wall drains are in place, but before earth backfill is placed, call for a backfill/drainage inspection.

D. When all work has been completed, call for a final inspection.

## II. WALL HEIGHT

Wall height is measured from the top of the footing to the top of the wall.

Walls not shown in Tables A and B on page 2 must be designed specifically for the existing conditions. The walls shown here are designed to retain earth banks with level backfill. No building foundation, driveway, or other loading on the upper level is al-

lowed with a distance equal to the height of the wall. See Building Newsletter 23-3 for design procedures for surcharged walls.

## III. BLOCK

All block must be type "N" grouted solid with  $f'_m = 1,500$  psi.

## IV. MIX REQUIREMENTS

*Note that use of plastic cement is not permitted in retaining walls located in Seismic Zone No. 3 or 4.*

A. The concrete mix for footings must meet a compressive strength of  $f'_c = 2,000$  psi minimum, or the following proportions by volume:

- 1 part Portland cement
- 2 1/2 parts sand
- 3 1/2 parts 3/4-inch maximum-size gravel
- 7 gallons of water maximum per sack of cement

B. The mortar mix must have a compressive strength equal to 1,800 psi minimum. One possible mix contains the following proportions by volume:

- 1 part Portland cement
- 3 1/2 parts sand
- 1/4 part hydrated lime or lime putty

C. Grout must have a compressive strength equal to 2,000 psi minimum. One possible mix contains the following proportions by volume:

- 1 part Portland cement
- 3 parts sand
- 2 parts pea gravel (3/8-inch aggregate)

Add water until pouring consistency is achieved without segregation of the grout constituents. Rod or vibrate immediately. Rerod or revibrate grout about 10 minutes after pouring to ensure solid consolidation. Stop grout 2 inches from top of masonry units when grouting of second lift is to be continued at another time.

*Note: All cells must be filled solid with grout.*

## V. MORTAR KEY

To insure proper bonding between the footing and the first course of block, a mortar key must be formed by embedding a flat 2x4 flush with and at the top of the freshly placed footing. It should be removed after the concrete has started to harden (about 1 hour). A mortar key may be omitted if the first course of block is set into the fresh concrete when the footing is placed and a good bond is obtained.

## VI. WALL DRAINS

Wall drains (four-inch-diameter) must be placed at 6-foot intervals along the length of the wall and located just above the level of the soil or paving on the front face of the wall. The drains may be formed by placing a block on its side at 6-foot intervals, by leaving out the mortar in the vertical spaces between all the blocks in the first course above the soil or paving (head joint) on the front face of the wall or by any other acceptable equivalent method. Backfill behind wall drains or open head joints must be loose rubble or gravel 12 inches wide and extending from the top of the wall to the top of the footing.

## VII. SOIL

Wall design, footing sizes, and reinforcing steel are all based on an active earth pressure with an equivalent fluid weight of 30 pounds per cubic foot. All footings must extend at least 12 inches into undisturbed natural soil or compacted fill which has been compacted to at least 90 percent density. Soil should be dampened prior to placing concrete in footings. A soils report, compiled by a licensed civil engineer, may be required.

A minimum of 7 feet must be provided horizontally from the toe of the footing to daylight where the ground slopes away from the base of the wall.

Footing sizes given in Table A are based on a 1,000 psf maximum soil bearing value; use of a larger bearing value will require design by a licensed architect or civil engineer specifically for the existing conditions. A soils report, compiled by a licensed civil engineer, may be required.

## VI. REINFORCING STEEL

Reinforcing steel must be deformed and comply with ASTM specification A615-85, Grade 40 or 60. When one continuous bar cannot be used, a lap or splice of 40-bar diameters is required.

Two #3 bars must be placed longitudinally in the footing as shown in figures 1 and 2.

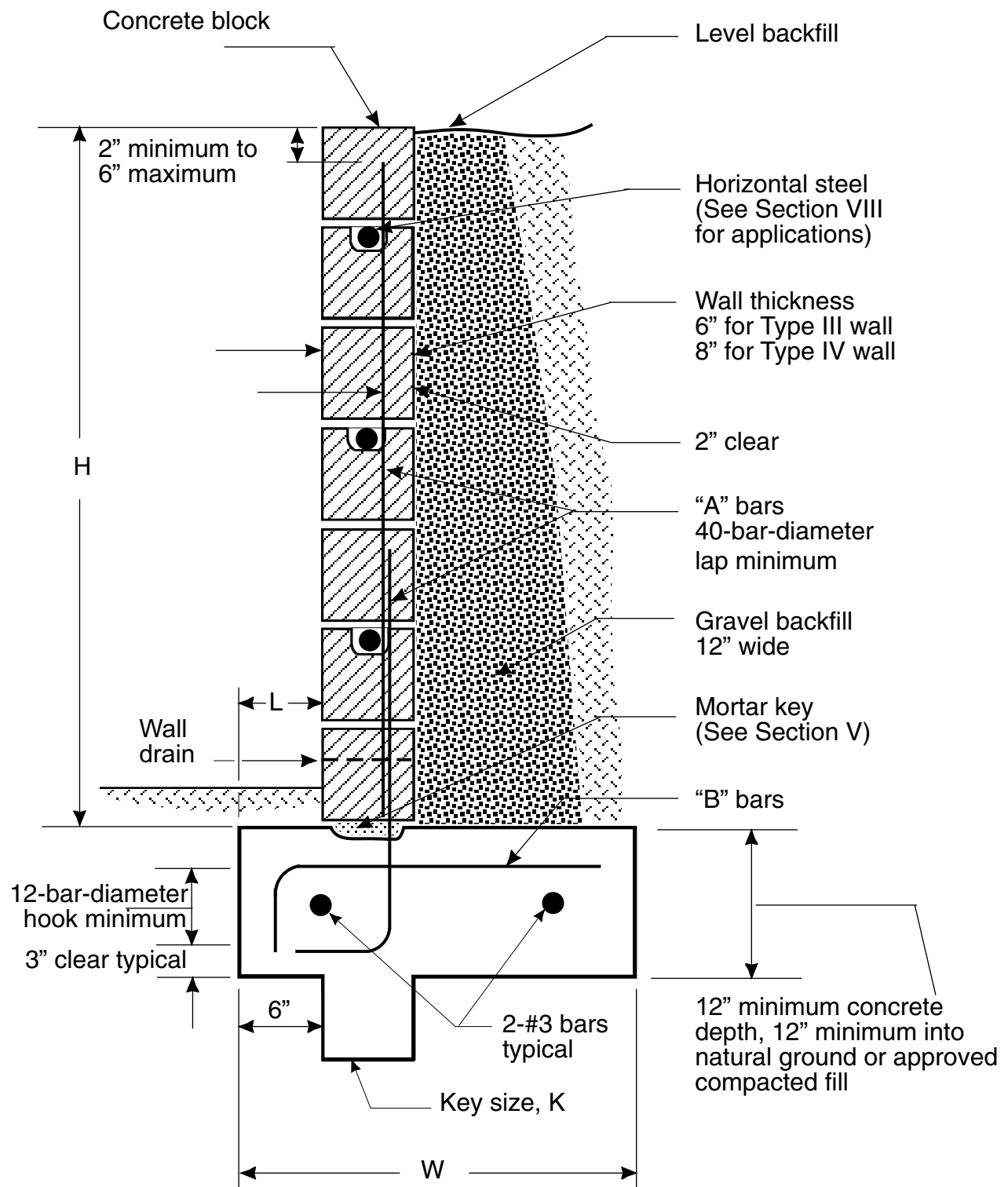
For 6-inch or 8-inch blocks, one #3 reinforcing bar must be placed longitudinally in the center of the wall in a bond beam block every 16 inches as the blocks are laid up. For 12-inch blocks, one #4 reinforcing bar must be placed longitudinally in the center of the wall in a bond beam block every 16 inches as the blocks are laid up.

**Table A/Requirements for Various Wall Heights** <sup>1,2,3</sup>

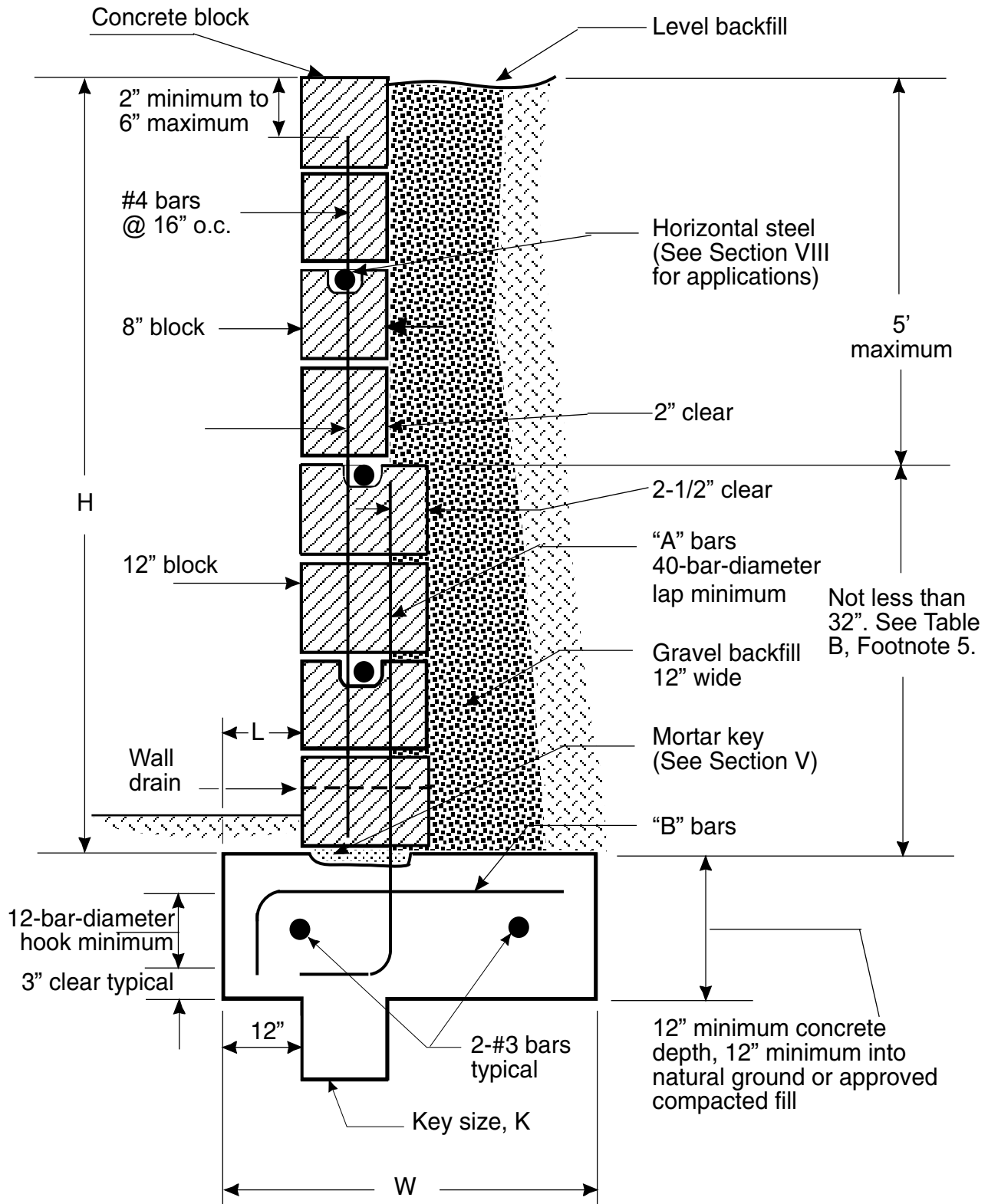
| Wall Height (H) | Wall Type | Toe Dimension (L) | Footing Width (W) | Key Size (K) | "A" Bars       | "B" Bars       |
|-----------------|-----------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1'-4"           | III       | 2"                | 1'- 3"            | None         | #3s @ 24" o.c. | None           |
| 2'-0"           | III       | 2"                | 1'- 6"            | None         | #3s @ 24" o.c. | None           |
| 2'-8"           | III       | 3"                | 1'-10"            | None         | #3s @ 24" o.c. | #3s @ 48" o.c. |
| 3'-4"           | III       | 4"                | 2'- 1"            | None         | #3s @ 24" o.c. | #3s @ 48" o.c. |
| 4'-0"           | IV        | 6"                | 2'- 6"            | None         | #4s @ 24" o.c. | #3s @ 32" o.c. |
| 4'-8"           | IV        | 11"               | 2'-11"            | None         | #4s @ 24" o.c. | #4s @ 24" o.c. |
| 5'-4"           | IV        | 12"               | 3'- 2"            | 6" x 6"      | #4s @ 16" o.c. | #4s @ 24" o.c. |
| 6'-0"           | V         | 16"               | 3'-10"            | 8" x 8"      | #4s @ 16" o.c. | #4s @ 24" o.c. |
| 6'-8"           | V         | 16"               | 4'- 4"            | 8" x 8"      | #4s @ 16" o.c. | #4s @ 16" o.c. |
| 7'-4"           | V         | 16"               | 5'- 0"            | 12" x 12"    | #5s @ 16" o.c. | #4s @ 16" o.c. |
| 8'-0"           | V         | 20"               | 5'- 8"            | 12" x 12"    | #6s @ 16" o.c. | #4s @ 16" o.c. |

### Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Footing sizes are based on 1,000 psf maximum soil bearing value. The resultant is within the middle third of the footing.
- <sup>2</sup> Wall not shown in Table A above must be designed specifically for the actual condition.
- <sup>3</sup> All construction must comply with the specifications shown in this information bulletin.
- <sup>4</sup> When Wall Type V is required, the first 32 inches of block, regardless of wall height, must be 12-inch-wide masonry units.

**Figure 1/Type III or IV retaining wall with level backfill**

**Note:** A minimum of 7 feet must be provided horizontally from the toe of the footing to daylight where the ground slopes away from the base of the wall.

**Figure 2/Type V retaining wall with level backfill**

**Note:** A minimum of 7 feet must be provided horizontally from the toe of the footing to daylight where the ground slopes away from the base of the wall.